



February 16, 2022

Dear Somerset and Somerset Berkley Families,

At yesterday's joint school committee meeting, the Somerset School Committee voted to rescind its face covering policy altogether while the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee voted to amend the existing face-covering policy. Regardless of having a policy or not, both School Committees voted to end the mask mandate in schools. Instead, **beginning on Monday, February 28 wearing masks in schools will be optional but still strongly recommended.** There are three exceptions for when masks must be worn in schools:

1. Students and staff returning from a 5-day quarantine following a positive COVID test must follow strict mask use, other than when eating, drinking, or outside through day 10 of exposure.
2. By federal public health order, all students and staff are required to wear a mask on school-provided transportation.
3. Masks will be required in all school health offices.

I have asked that faculty and staff be on the lookout for any harassing/teasing/bullying that might occur either targeting any students based on their choice to wear or to not wear a mask. We may not be aware of students' personal health issues that warrant mask-wearing or their family situations that may involve someone immunocompromised at home. In these cases, wearing a mask at school is an added layer of protection to keep someone from getting COVID. I have also asked teachers to refrain from sharing their personal opinions about masks to avoid any classroom situations that may cause students to be uncomfortable about their choice to wear or to not wear a mask.

Since the start of 2022 we have experienced a significant decrease in COVID cases among students and employees with 216 total positive cases in our schools during the week of January 3, 109 total cases during the week of January 17, 17 total cases during the week of February 7, to only four cases so far this week through Wednesday afternoon. This is a similar trend to what we experienced last year beginning in mid-January and extending right through the end of the school year. Optimism for a continuing decline is based not only on this similar pattern to last year but also due to our increasing vaccination rates that currently range from about 25% at the elementary schools to nearly 75% at the high school and increasing participation in our at-home testing program and the in-school testing for symptomatic individuals program.

The Somerset Berkley policy is attached to this message for the families of SBRHS students to review.

Sincerely,
Jeff Schoonover